

Teachers' Perceptions of Headmasters' Transformational Leadership Practices in Malaysian Primary Schools

Norsafura Shamsuri^{1*}, Suhaizal Hashim²

Faculty of Technical and Vocational Education, University of Tun Hussein Onn, Batu Pahat, Malaysia

*Corresponding Author

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ABSTRACT

Transformational leadership has been widely recognised as an effective leadership approach in educational settings, particularly in fostering teacher motivation, organisational commitment, and school improvement. In Malaysia, primary school headmasters are expected to navigate increasing administrative demands, accountability pressures, and concerns related to teacher well-being and retention. Despite the relevance of transformational leadership in this context, empirical evidence examining headmasters' leadership practices from teachers' perspectives remains limited, especially at the primary school level. This study aims to empirically examine teachers' perceptions of headmasters' transformational leadership practices in Malaysian primary schools using the Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI). A quantitative survey design was employed, involving 103 primary school teachers from both urban and rural schools in Malaysia. Data were collected using a Malay version questionnaire adapted for the primary school context. Descriptive statistics were used to examine the level and distribution of transformational leadership practices, while Pearson correlation analysis explored relationships among the five LPI dimensions. Independent-samples *t*-tests and one-way ANOVA were conducted to examine differences in teachers' perceptions based on gender, school location, and years of teaching experience. The findings indicated that headmasters' transformational leadership practices were perceived to be at a moderate to high level overall. *Model the Way* and *Enable Others to Act* emerged as the most prominently enacted leadership practices, whereas *Encourage the Heart* was perceived as the least dominant. Strong and positive correlations were observed among all five leadership practices and between each dimension and the overall leadership score, supporting the internal coherence of the LPI framework. Inferential analyses revealed no statistically significant differences in perceptions based on gender, school location, or teaching experience. The study provides preliminary empirical evidence on leadership practices in Malaysian primary schools and highlights important implications for leadership development, teacher support, and future research.

Keywords: Transformational leadership, teachers' perceptions, Leadership Practices Inventory

INTRODUCTION

Educational leadership plays a central role in shaping school culture, teacher professionalism, and organisational effectiveness. In primary schools, headmasters are not only responsible for administrative management but also for creating environments that support teaching quality, collaboration, and teacher well-being. As educational systems face increasing complexity due to curriculum reforms, accountability mechanisms, and heightened public expectations, leadership approaches that emphasise motivation, empowerment, and shared vision have gained prominence.

Transformational leadership has emerged as one of the most influential leadership frameworks in educational research. This leadership approach focuses on inspiring followers, fostering trust, encouraging innovation, and recognising individual contributions. Kit Kilg et al., (2024) also mentioned that transformational leadership fosters positive work environments by enhancing job satisfaction, commitment, and teacher motivation through behaviours such as inspirational leadership and individualized support. In school contexts, transformational leadership has been associated with positive teacher outcomes such as job satisfaction, organisational commitment, professional engagement, and reduced stress. Evidence also suggests transformational leadership

may help reduce teachers' role stress through mechanisms such as enhanced job satisfaction and affective commitment, improving overall teacher well-being (Yong & Zhang, 2025). These outcomes are particularly relevant in primary education, where stable teaching teams and supportive leadership are crucial for sustaining instructional quality.

Burns (1978) introduced the concept of transformational leadership, emphasising leadership as a process that transforms and enhances followers' motivation and performance. Bass (1985) subsequently extended this theory by introducing four core dimensions of transformational leadership. A contemporary transformational leadership framework is the Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership proposed by Kouzes and Posner (2007). Kouzes and Posner conducted interviews with approximately 1,300 leaders and managers to identify exemplary leadership practices across workplace contexts. In their work, Kouzes and Posner (2007) integrated emotional intelligence into the understanding of effective leadership, linking it to transformational leadership and the role of emotional values in influencing followers. They emphasised that effective leaders not only possess technical and cognitive skills but also demonstrate high levels of emotional intelligence to understand, manage, and motivate their followers.

Previous research using the Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI) has demonstrated that transformational leadership practices are not enacted uniformly across its five dimensions. Kouzes and Posner (2002) reported that *Enabling Others to Act* and *Modeling the Way* were the most frequently practised leadership behaviors, whereas *Inspiring a Shared Vision* was perceived as the least frequently enacted practice. This pattern suggests that school leaders may prioritise relational and collaborative practices over visionary leadership behaviors.

In Malaysia, school leadership is enacted within a centralised education system that emphasises policy compliance, accountability, and administrative reporting. Within such contexts, relational and affective leadership practices may receive less explicit emphasis compared to organisational and instructional demands, shaping how transformational leadership is enacted and perceived by teachers in everyday school life.

Recent discussions surrounding teacher workload, burnout, and early retirement have drawn attention to the importance of school leadership in supporting teachers. The teaching profession in Malaysia is often associated with high levels of stress and burnout, where educational demands and workload contribute to emotional exhaustion among teachers (Ani et al., 2025). Primary school headmasters operate within a centralised system while simultaneously being expected to respond to local school needs and teacher concerns. Consequently, examining headmasters' leadership practices from teachers' perspectives is timely and necessary.

Teachers' perceptions provide valuable insights into leadership effectiveness because teachers interact directly with headmasters and are influenced by leadership behaviours on a daily basis. Understanding how teachers perceive headmasters' leadership practices is particularly important in light of increasing concerns about teacher well-being, work stress, and retention. Recent evidence indicates that a significant proportion of teachers in Malaysia have opted for early retirement, with loss of interest, workload pressures, and limited organisational support cited as key reasons. Aishah et al., (2024) and Li & Zhao, (2023) also mentioned that contemporary changes in the Malaysian education system have impacted teachers' mental well-being, where work stress pressures have been linked to decisions such as early retirement or exit from the profession which a situation that heightens concerns about retention and systemic stability. These issues underscore the need to examine leadership practices that may contribute to a more supportive and motivating school environment.

However, empirical evidence on transformational leadership practices among Malaysian primary school headmasters, particularly using validated instruments and teachers' perspectives, remains limited. Addressing this gap is essential for informing leadership development initiatives and policy decisions.

The main objective of this study is to empirically examine teachers' perceptions of headmasters' transformational leadership practices in Malaysian primary schools using the Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI). Specifically, the study seeks to determine the overall level of transformational leadership practices demonstrated by primary school headmasters, to examine the extent to which each of the five leadership practices measured by the LPI is enacted, and to identify the most and least dominant leadership practices based on teachers' perceptions.

Transformational Leadership in Education

Transformational leadership is characterised by behaviours that inspire followers to transcend self-interest for collective goals, encourage innovation, and foster professional growth. In educational settings, transformational leaders articulate a clear vision, model ethical behaviour, support teachers' development, and create collaborative cultures. Transformational leadership refers to principals establishing shared goals and fostering collaborative school environments that meet teachers' needs, stimulate their growth potential, and encourage innovative behaviour (Bao, 2024). Research consistently demonstrates that transformational leadership contributes positively to school improvement by enhancing teachers' motivation, commitment, and sense of efficacy.

Extensive literature shows that transformational leadership practices are linked to enhanced job satisfaction, higher organisational commitment, and improved professional learning communities in school contexts (J. A. Shaikhah et al., 2023). In schools, transformational leadership is often conceptualised through practices that emphasise vision building, empowerment, intellectual stimulation, and recognition. These practices align closely with the complex and relational nature of educational organisations, where leadership influence is largely indirect and mediated through teachers' attitudes and behaviours.

Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI)

The Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI) operationalises transformational leadership through five core leadership practices: *Model the Way*, *Inspire a Shared Vision*, *Challenge the Process*, *Enable Others to Act*, and *Encourage the Heart*. The LPI has been widely used in educational research to assess leadership practices based on follower perceptions. Its focus on observable behaviours makes it particularly suitable for studies examining leadership in schools.

Empirical studies employing the Leadership Practices Inventory have consistently shown variation in the extent to which the five leadership practices are enacted. For instance, Kouzes and Posner (2002) found that *Enabling Others to Act* was the most frequently reported leadership practice, followed closely by *Modeling the Way*. In contrast, *Inspiring a Shared Vision* was perceived as the least frequently practised dimension. These findings suggest that while transformational leadership is multifaceted, certain practices tend to be more salient in leaders' day-to-day interactions than others.

Empirical studies using the LPI have demonstrated that leadership practices related to empowerment and recognition are often more prominent in educational contexts, especially within collectivist cultures. The instrument has shown strong reliability and validity across diverse educational settings, supporting its use in empirical leadership research.

Teachers' Perceptions and Leadership Effectiveness

Teachers' perceptions of leadership practices are closely linked to important organisational outcomes, including job satisfaction, organisational commitment, and school climate. Teachers who perceive their leaders as supportive, fair, and inspiring are more likely to demonstrate higher levels of engagement and professional commitment. In contrast, leadership practices perceived as overly bureaucratic or unsupportive may contribute to stress and disengagement.

In Malaysian schools, cultural values emphasising respect, harmony, and collective responsibility may further shape how leadership practices are perceived. Leadership behaviours that promote collaboration, trust, and recognition may therefore be particularly influential in shaping teachers' experiences.

While transformational leadership has been extensively studied internationally, empirical research focusing on primary school headmasters in Malaysia, using teachers' perceptions and validated instruments such as the LPI, remains limited. Moreover, few studies have examined the relative emphasis placed on different leadership practices within this context. This study seeks to address these gaps by providing preliminary empirical evidence on headmasters' transformational leadership practices in Malaysian primary schools.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative cross-sectional survey design to examine teachers' perceptions of transformational leadership practices among primary school headmasters in Malaysia. A survey approach was deemed appropriate as it allows for the systematic collection of perceptual data from a relatively large number of respondents within a limited timeframe. Given the exploratory nature of the study, the design focused on describing patterns of leadership practices and examining selected relationships and group differences rather than establishing causal effects.

Population and Sample

The target population of this study comprised primary school teachers in Malaysian government primary schools. Due to practical and access constraints, the accessible population consisted of teachers who could be reached through online survey distribution and in-person administration during the data collection period.

A total of 103 primary school teachers participated in the study. The sample was obtained using a non-probability sampling approach, combining convenience sampling and voluntary response sampling. Paper-based questionnaires were administered predominantly in Johor, where physical access to schools was feasible, while online questionnaires were distributed more broadly to teachers in other states.

Given the sampling approach and the exploratory nature of the study, the findings are interpreted as reflective of the perceptions of the participating teachers and are not intended to represent the national population of primary school teachers.

Research Instrument

Data were collected using the Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI)–Observer version, which measures transformational leadership practices through teachers' perceptions of their headmasters across five leadership practices. The instrument assesses leadership behaviours across five core practices: *Model the Way*, *Inspire a Shared Vision*, *Challenge the Process*, *Enable Others to Act*, and *Encourage the Heart*. The 30-item instrument was administered in Malay and applied within the primary school context with each leadership practice represented by six items. Responses were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*Never*) to 5 (*Very Often*). The translated items were checked for language clarity and contextual appropriateness to ensure that they were understandable and relevant to Malaysian primary school teachers, with only minor wording adjustments made where necessary. The original five-practice structure of the LPI was retained, and no additional factor analysis was conducted due to the exploratory nature of the study and the modest sample size. Internal consistency reliability was examined using Cronbach's alpha, and the results indicated acceptable reliability for exploratory research purposes. It is also carried out by Abu-Tineh et al., (2008), in their research which also showed a great value of reliability.

Online surveys often achieve lower response rates compared to mixed-mode or mail surveys, particularly when reliant on web-only contact and without extensive follow-up (Millar & Dillman, 2011). Studies have shown that web-only response rates can be in the low tens of percent or even lower without multimode follow-up strategies. This contextualises the relatively low online return rate in the present study.

Data analysis

Data were analysed using SPSS (Version 29). Prior to analysis, data screening procedures were conducted to examine missing values, normality, and potential outliers. A total of 103 valid cases were retained following listwise deletion of incomplete data. Normality was assessed through skewness and kurtosis values, normal Q–Q plots, and boxplots, which indicated acceptable distributional properties for exploratory analysis. Descriptive statistics were computed to examine teachers' perceptions of the five transformational leadership practices. Internal consistency reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. Pearson correlation analysis was employed to examine relationships among the leadership practices, and an independent-samples *t*-test was

conducted to explore gender differences in one selected domain. All analyses were conducted using a two-tailed significance level of .05.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Reliability analysis was conducted on 103 valid responses, representing 99.0% of the dataset, with one case excluded through listwise deletion. The five-item scale demonstrated strong internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha of .904, indicating that the items functioned coherently as a single construct for exploratory research purposes. Item mean scores ranged from 3.73 to 4.00, reflecting generally moderate to high levels of agreement among teachers. Corrected item-total correlations ranged from .603 to .833, exceeding recommended thresholds, and the Cronbach's alpha values if items were deleted did not indicate any improvement over the overall scale reliability. The overall scale mean was 3.87 ($SD = 0.59$), suggesting that teachers perceived the leadership practices measured at a moderate-to-high level. Collectively, these results indicate that the scale demonstrated adequate reliability and provided a sound empirical basis for subsequent interpretation of teachers' perceptions in the present study.

Pearson correlation analysis revealed significant positive relationships among all five LPI practices, with correlation coefficients ranging from .52 to .79 ($p < .001$). The strongest associations were observed among *Model the Way*, *Inspire a Shared Vision*, and *Challenge the Process*, while *Encourage the Heart* showed comparatively weaker, though still moderate, relationships with other practices. These findings indicate a coherent yet differentiated pattern of transformational leadership practices as perceived by teachers. Pearson correlation analysis in Table 1 revealed strong and significant positive relationships among all LPI dimensions and between each dimension and the overall leadership score, supporting the coherence of the transformational leadership construct in the primary school context.

Table 1: Pearson Correlations among Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI) Dimensions (N = 103)

Variable	Model the Way (T1)	Inspire a Shared Vision (T2)	Challenge the Process (T3)	Enable Others to Act (T4)	Encourage the Heart (T5)	LPI Overall	M	SD
Model the Way (T1)	—						4.00	.72
Inspire a Shared Vision (T2)	.77**	—					3.84	.62
Challenge the Process (T3)	.76**	.79**	—				3.79	.70
Enable Others to Act (T4)	.72**	.69**	.70**	—			3.98	.70
Encourage the Heart (T5)	.58**	.52**	.54**	.53**	—		3.73	.72
LPI Overall	.90**	.88**	.89**	.85**	.75**	—	3.87	.59

$p < .01$ (two-tailed).

Descriptive analysis was conducted to examine teachers' perceptions of headmasters' transformational leadership practices across the five dimensions of the Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI). As presented in Table 2, the overall level of transformational leadership was perceived to be at a moderate to high level ($M = 3.87$, $SD = 0.59$). Among the five leadership practices, *Model the Way* ($M = 4.00$, $SD = 0.72$) and *Enable Others to Act* ($M = 3.98$, $SD = 0.70$) emerged as the most prominently enacted practices. These were followed by *Inspire a Shared Vision* ($M = 3.84$, $SD = 0.62$) and *Challenge the Process* ($M = 3.79$, $SD = 0.70$). In contrast,

Encourage the Heart recorded the lowest mean score ($M = 3.73$, $SD = 0.72$), although it remained within the moderate range. Overall, the descriptive findings indicate that headmasters were generally perceived to demonstrate transformational leadership behaviours, with greater emphasis on role modelling, empowerment, and shared vision than on recognition and encouragement.

The analysis revealed no statistically significant difference between male and female teachers' perceptions of the *Encourage the Heart* leadership practice, although male teachers reported slightly higher mean scores. This finding suggests that practices related to recognition, appreciation, and emotional encouragement are generally perceived in a similar manner across gender groups within the primary school context. The absence of a statistically robust difference aligns with previous research indicating that teachers' perceptions of school leadership are often shaped more by organisational culture and leadership behaviours than by individual demographic characteristics such as gender.

An analysis of the participants' demographic information (Table 2) indicates that the majority of the respondents were female (66, 67%), while 32 (33%) were male. Most of the participants were experienced teachers, with a large proportion having more than 10 years of teaching experience (78, 75%). In terms of academic qualifications, the majority of respondents held a bachelor's degree (92, 88.5%), followed by a smaller proportion with a master's degree. Overall, the demographic profile suggests that the sample comprised predominantly experienced and professionally qualified primary school teachers, providing a credible basis for examining perceptions of headmasters' transformational leadership practices.

Table 2: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Variable	Number	%
<i>Gender</i>		
Females	66	67
Males	32	33
<i>Age group</i>		
21–30		1.9
31–40	2	31.7
41–50	33	45.2
≥ 51	47	20.2
	21	
<i>Teaching experience</i>		
1-5 years	3	2.9
6-10 years	21	20.2
> 10 years	78	75
<i>School location</i>		
Rural	37	35.5
Urban	67	64.4
<i>Highest qualification</i>		
Certificate/ Diploma	4	3.8
Bachelor's degree	92	88.5
Master's degree	8	7.7
<i>Years under current headmaster</i>	15	14.4

< 1 year	71	68.3
1–5 years	17	16.3
6–10 years		

Note. Valid percentages are reported.

Prior to analysis, the dataset was screened for missing values. A small number of missing responses were identified in selected demographic variables. Given the minimal extent of missing data, listwise deletion was applied, resulting in 98 valid cases for demographic reporting and 103 cases for the main analyses.

Pearson correlation analysis was performed to examine the relationships among the five leadership practices and between each practice and the overall LPI score. The results revealed positive and statistically significant correlations among all five dimensions, with correlation coefficients ranging from moderate to strong ($r = .52$ to $.79$, $p < .001$). Strong associations were observed between *Model the Way* and *Inspire a Shared Vision* ($r = .77$), as well as between *Inspire a Shared Vision* and *Challenge the Process* ($r = .79$). Similarly, *Challenge the Process* demonstrated a strong relationship with *Enable Others to Act* ($r = .70$). These findings suggest that the leadership practices measured by the LPI are closely interrelated and tend to co-occur in practice. In addition, all five leadership practices showed very strong correlations with the overall LPI score, ranging from $r = .75$ to $r = .90$ ($p < .001$). The strongest relationship was observed between *Model the Way* and the overall leadership score ($r = .90$), followed closely by *Challenge the Process* ($r = .89$) and *Inspire a Shared Vision* ($r = .88$). The confidence intervals for these correlations were narrow and did not include zero, indicating stable estimates of association. Taken together, these results support the internal coherence of the LPI dimensions and suggest that transformational leadership practices function as an integrated set of behaviours rather than as isolated actions.

To explore whether teachers' perceptions of headmasters' transformational leadership practices differed based on selected teacher characteristics, a series of inferential analyses were conducted using the overall LPI score. Independent-samples t -tests indicated no statistically significant differences in overall transformational leadership practices based on gender, with male and female teachers reporting comparable perceptions of headmasters' leadership. Similarly, no significant differences were found based on school location, as teachers from urban and rural schools reported largely similar levels of transformational leadership. In addition, a one way ANOVA revealed no significant differences in overall transformational leadership practices across different levels of teaching experience, $F(2, 99) = 0.72$, $p = .489$, with a very small effect size ($\eta^2 = .014$). These findings indicate that teachers' perceptions of headmasters' transformational leadership practices were consistent across gender, school location, and teaching experience within the participating sample.

Nevertheless, the observed small-to-moderate effect size may point to a potential trend that warrants cautious consideration. It is possible that male and female teachers experience or interpret recognition and encouragement practices differently due to variations in professional expectations, communication styles, or relational dynamics within schools. However, given the exploratory nature of the study, the unequal group sizes, and the confidence interval crossing zero, such interpretations remain tentative and should not be overstated.

Importantly, *Encourage the Heart* may function as a broadly inclusive leadership practice that transcends gender distinctions, reinforcing its role as a universally valued dimension of transformational leadership. From a practical perspective, this finding implies that efforts to strengthen recognition and emotional support practices by headmasters may benefit teachers regardless of gender. Future studies employing larger and more balanced samples, as well as qualitative approaches, could provide deeper insight into how recognition-oriented leadership is experienced across diverse teacher groups.

FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Findings

The pattern of significant positive correlations among the five Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI) dimensions suggests that transformational leadership practices tend to be enacted in an interconnected manner within Malaysian primary schools. Strong associations among *Model the Way*, *Inspire a Shared Vision*, and *Challenge the Process* indicate that headmasters who are perceived as credible role models are also more likely

to articulate meaningful directions and support change-oriented practices. From a teacher well-being perspective, such coherence in leadership behaviours may contribute to a clearer sense of purpose and professional alignment, which has been shown to reduce uncertainty and work-related stress in school environments. This finding also aligned with Yin & Mohd Hamzah, (2023), headmasters' transformational leadership practices is perceived to be at a high level.

The moderate to strong relationships between *Enable Others to Act* and the other leadership practices further highlight the importance of empowerment and relational trust in supporting teachers. Leadership behaviours that encourage collaboration, shared decision-making, and professional autonomy are particularly relevant in the context of increasing teacher workload and administrative demands. When teachers perceive that their headmasters trust and support them, they may experience greater psychological safety and professional efficacy, both of which are key components of teacher well-being. Research from Bellibas et al., (2025) also indicates that transformational school leadership is associated with positive teacher outcomes including psychological capital and well-being, emphasising the role of relational trust and supportive leadership.

Notably, *Encourage the Heart* demonstrated consistently weaker, though still significant, correlations with the other leadership practices. This finding suggests that recognition, appreciation, and emotional reinforcement may be enacted less consistently or perceived as more situational compared to other leadership behaviours. In light of recent concerns regarding teacher burnout and declining motivation, this pattern may be significant. While teachers generally perceived leadership practices positively, the relatively weaker integration of encouragement and recognition practices may indicate an area where leadership support for emotional and motivational needs could be strengthened. Consistent with this, Feher and Kollar, (2024) reported that top management roles tend to prioritise organisational transformation over interpersonal transformation, underscoring the need for school leaders to give greater attention to people-centred leadership and staff development.

The finding also suggests that recognition- and emotion-focused leadership practices may be less systematically embedded in headmasters' daily routines. Within the Malaysian primary school context, headmasters operate in a highly centralised system characterised by strong administrative demands, compliance requirements, and performance monitoring. These structural pressures may prioritise task-oriented leadership (e.g., coordination, monitoring, instructional supervision) over relational practices such as regular appreciation, celebration of effort, and emotional affirmation. Cultural norms emphasising professionalism, respect for hierarchy, and modesty may also shape how recognition is expressed, potentially making encouragement less visible or more implicit in school leadership practices.

Taken together, the findings imply that while transformational leadership practices are broadly present, greater emphasis on consistent recognition and emotional support may be particularly important for enhancing teacher well-being. In an educational climate where issues such as stress, burnout, and early retirement have become increasingly salient, leadership practices that attend not only to vision and performance but also to teachers' emotional experiences may play a critical role in sustaining a motivated and resilient teaching workforce. However, given the exploratory and cross-sectional nature of the study, these interpretations should be viewed as indicative rather than causal, and future research is needed to examine the direct relationships between leadership practices and specific indicators of teacher well-being.

Limitations

This study employed a non-probability sampling approach with a modest sample size, with a substantial proportion of responses drawn from selected states and schools. Consequently, the findings should be interpreted as indicative of the perceptions of participating teachers rather than representative of all Malaysian primary school teachers. The mixed-mode data collection approach (online and face-to-face) and the relatively low online response rate may also introduce response bias, potentially favouring teachers who were more accessible or more willing to participate. These factors limit the generalisability of the findings and warrant caution in extrapolating the results to broader populations.

Conclusion

This study empirically examined teachers' perceptions of headmasters' transformational leadership practices in Malaysian primary schools using the Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI). The findings indicate that, overall,

transformational leadership practices were perceived to be enacted at a moderate to high level. Analysis of the five LPI dimensions revealed variations in the extent to which specific leadership practices were enacted. Practices related to role modelling, shared vision, and empowerment were perceived as more prominent, whereas practices associated with recognition and encouragement were comparatively less dominant. These findings provide an empirical snapshot of how transformational leadership practices are experienced by participating teachers and highlight areas of relative strength and potential enhancement within primary school leadership.

These findings have implications for the professional development of primary school headmasters, particularly within leadership training programmes such as the NPQEL and continuous professional development initiatives. While current programmes appropriately emphasise instructional and organisational leadership, the lower prominence of *Encourage the Heart* indicates a need to strengthen training related to interpersonal and people centred leadership practices. Greater emphasis on recognising teachers' contributions and fostering a supportive school climate may help headmasters balance organisational demands with staff development and teacher wellbeing.

Recommendations

Given that transformational leadership practices were generally perceived to be enacted at a moderate to high level, it is recommended that school leadership development efforts continue to strengthen these practices, particularly those related to role modelling, shared vision, and empowerment. Headmasters should be encouraged to sustain behaviours that promote trust, professional autonomy, and collaborative decision-making, as these practices were perceived positively by teachers.

However, the comparatively lower prominence of *Encourage the Heart* suggests a need for greater emphasis on recognition, appreciation, and emotional support within school leadership. Headmasters may benefit from targeted training that focuses on acknowledging teachers' contributions, celebrating small achievements, and providing consistent positive feedback. Such practices may help foster a more supportive school climate and enhance teachers' motivation and sense of professional value. Strengthening these dimensions within national leadership development policies may support more sustainable school leadership practices that attend not only to organisational performance but also to teacher well-being and retention.

At the system level, leadership training programmes for primary school headmasters may consider incorporating more explicit components related to affective and relational leadership, alongside existing emphasis on instructional and managerial competencies. Leadership frameworks and professional standards could highlight the importance of balancing task-oriented leadership with practices that attend to teachers' emotional and motivational needs.

In addition, professional learning opportunities such as mentoring, coaching, and peer-learning communities among headmasters could be leveraged to share effective practices related to recognition and encouragement. These initiatives may support the development of more holistic leadership approaches that respond to both organisational demands and teacher well-being.

Given the exploratory design, non-probability sampling approach, and modest sample size of the present study, future research is recommended to employ larger and more diverse samples to enhance the robustness and generalisability of findings. Studies involving broader geographic coverage and more balanced representation across school contexts may provide deeper insight into patterns of transformational leadership practices in Malaysian primary schools.

Future research may also consider adopting mixed-methods designs, combining survey data with qualitative approaches such as interviews or focus groups. This would allow for a richer understanding of how specific leadership practices—particularly recognition and encouragement—are enacted and experienced in daily school life. Besides, stronger explanatory power should be considered for future research by directly measuring teacher outcomes such as job satisfaction, organisational commitment, well-being, or burnout alongside leadership practices. Incorporating these outcome variables in longitudinal or mixed-method designs would enable a more robust examination of how specific transformational leadership practices relate to teachers' professional experiences over time. Such designs would move beyond descriptive associations to provide clearer insights into potential pathways linking leadership behaviours and teacher well-being.

Finally, subsequent studies could examine the relationships between transformational leadership practices and key teacher outcomes, such as job satisfaction, commitment, well-being, or intention to remain in the profession. Such investigations would extend the present findings by exploring the potential implications of leadership practices beyond descriptive perceptions.

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